



HOW TO: Stay Calm in Tough Situations

We've all faced challenging situations at work. Sometimes we can step away to pause and collect ourselves, but sometimes conflict surfaces in the middle of a tense meeting or a challenging interaction with a client. Here are some things you can do in mere seconds to stay calm during a difficult interaction at your nonprofit.

Before Conflict Arises

Nourish yourself. Make it a regular practice to get enough exercise, eat nourishing food, drink plenty of water, and replenish your system with sleep. The more mental and physical resources you can draw on when conflict arises, the better off you'll be.

During Conflict

Breathe. Even in the middle of a tough conversation, you can take deep breaths, which activates the calming capacity of your parasympathetic nervous system. Inhale for four counts and exhale for six. When your exhales are longer than your inhaleds, it primes your body to leave fight-or-flight and enter a more relaxed state.

Cool down. Literally. To change your physiological response to conflict, bring down your body temperature. Take a sip of water, touch a cool surface in the room, or put an ice cube from your drink in your mouth.

Ask questions. Give yourself time to respond in a constructive way. Ask questions like, "I'm hearing that you're unhappy with how our app is working for your benefits. What else do you need me to know about the problem?" This will help you process your emotions and consider what to do next.

Distract yourself. You need to listen to the person who's upset you, but at the same time, give yourself something to think about besides your emotional response. Dig your feet into the floor, feel the sensation of your hips in your chair, or focus on the eye color of the person you're talking to.

Have some go-to responses. When you're not in the middle of conflict, take a moment to come up with a couple of things you could say in a heated situation. Examples include: "Thanks, I need a little time to think about that," or, "Can you tell me more about that?" This approach keeps you in the conversation while giving you precious time to calm down.

After Conflict

Take time to process. The strategies outlined here will help you navigate difficult situations with poise. But you'll still need to take time to understand what happened and your reaction; if you don't do so, mental and physical stress on your body will mount. Take time to explore your feelings about the conflict alone or with someone you trust. This will help you determine if you need to revisit the issue with your manager or the person who triggered you.



Helpful Resources.

[How to Quickly Calm Down When You're Triggered at Work](#) - Harvard Business Review

[4 Techniques to Control Your Emotions and Maintain Calm During Stressful Moments at Work](#) - Business Insider